



*Testimony by James M. Granfield, Ph.D.
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Good afternoon, Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee. My name is James Granfield and I am Interim Dean of the School of Education at Southern Connecticut State University. I want to thank you for this opportunity to speak to you today about early childhood education and to thank you for all the work this Committee has done and will do on behalf of Connecticut's children. I am here to speak on behalf of Senate Bill 1282: AN ACT CONCERNING MODEL EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING PROGRAMS.

The Governor's Task Force on Early Childhood Education (2005) has projected a serious shortfall of early childhood educators by the year 2015. At the rate Connecticut is now producing new early childhood education teachers within its teacher education programs, we will need approximately 3,000 new early childhood teachers by 2015, which translates into producing 300 *more* teachers each year than we are now producing in this State. This gap is at odds with the move toward the universal preschool initiatives of the Connecticut State Board of Education. There is, thus, a serious need to address the recruitment and preparation of future early childhood educators and address these in ways that assure that all future early childhood teachers will have access to high quality, evidence-based practices in their teacher preparation programs.

In accordance with Public Act 05-245, that recognizes that preschool children need and deserve appropriately trained teachers, the State of Connecticut has committed to improving the quality of early childhood education and child development programs. Learning in these years provides a critical foundation for positive development. Raising the qualifications of Early Childhood teachers will result in higher quality educational experiences for preschoolers. When children make greater gains in preschool, they enter kindergarten better prepared for school success. "Better trained teachers have more positive, sensitive and responsive interaction with children, provide richer language and cognitive experiences, and are less authoritarian, punitive and detached. The result is better social, emotional, linguistic and cognitive development for the child (Barnett, 2004 cited in Policy Brief prepared for the Early Childhood Research & Policy Council).

In an effort to provide culturally responsive and developmentally appropriate education and training to the early childhood workforce in Connecticut, the State Department of Education awarded Southern Connecticut State University and Leila Day Nursery in New Haven a \$200,000 grant to establish a model lab school and early childhood learning program. This project includes evidence-based enhancement opportunities to early childhood educators in Connecticut. These include such activities as:

1. Regular guided site visits to high quality lab school classrooms at Leila Day for early childhood professionals and child development staff around the region where best practices and curriculum aligned with the Connecticut Preschool Curriculum Framework can be observed and where master teachers demonstrate their knowledge, skills and dispositions to effectively prepare preschoolers for later academic and social success.
2. Workshops and presentations on early childhood practices and developmentally appropriate curriculum in order to enhance teacher competencies in supporting children's development. Southern faculty will provide consultations to teachers in their specialty areas including literacy, numeracy and child behavior and development.
3. In order to equip parents with the skills, knowledge and competencies that are critical for meeting the diverse developmental needs of their children, the pilot project will provide workshops and support to parents in such areas as literacy, numeracy, behavioral and developmental needs of their children in order to optimize their ability to support their children's growth and early development.
4. The pilot project will conduct joint workshops and presentations with partners in early childhood programs, colleges and universities, school readiness programs and Regional Educational Resource Centers around the state in order to disseminate best practices in early childhood education.

Members of the Education Committee, this legislation provides us with a wonderful opportunity to develop and disseminate a model of best practices in early childhood education in Connecticut. It promises to provide future teachers with the necessary experiences and skills to create a more positive future for Connecticut's school children. Early childhood education represents the foundation upon which to build later school success. Providing current and aspiring teachers with excellent models of preschool programs assures that foundation. Parents, as partners, need our support in this effort. SB 1282 assures this partnership. The expansion of this legislation to develop model early childhood learning programs to a five year period allows us to research, coordinate, and disseminate this model. Southern Connecticut State University, with its long history of preparing quality teachers, stands ready with you and others in our State to create and enhance this future for all children.

I thank you again for your work and wish you well in your efforts to create an inclusive, educational system that supports all children. I will be happy to answer any questions you might have at this time.